

THE  
ALPHABET  
OF  
REASON:

BEING

An ESSAY toward constructing a Plan to  
facilitate the Art of SWIFT WRITING, commonly  
called SHORT-HAND; upon Rational Principles.

L O N D O N,

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TO THE  
WORTHY PATRIOTS,  
ASSOCIATED FOR THE  
ENCOURAGEMENT  
OF  
ARTS, MANUFACTURES, and COMMERCE;

This little E S S A Y is addressed,

By the A U T H O R.



TO THE

WORTHY PATRIOTS

ASSOCIATED FOR THE

ENCOURAGEMENT

OF

ARTS, MANUFACTURES, AND COMMERCE

THE FOLLOWING IS A SUMMARY

By the AUTHOR



## THE ALPHABET OF REASON.

**W**RITING is the art of recording sounds: which is effected by substituting such signs for them, as when seen will always excite the ideas of the sounds for which they are used; and when uttered, will always produce those particular tones or articulations to which they are adapted.

Meer sound is denoted by characters graduated upon certain fixed lines, forming a scale comprehending all its modulations: this is the record of music or harmony.

Articulate sounds, composing the verbal intercourse among mankind, are all expressed by twenty-six characters; which, with trivial alteration, we derive from the Romans. By the various combinations of these twenty-six primitive sounds, marked by their corresponding letters, all human vocal expressions may be formed.

These letters however, though sufficiently copious for the purpose of recording ideas, or language the signs of ideas, are too complex in their formation, to enable a person in particular circumstances, to register a quick succession of thoughts; or to record from the mouth of an orator: without the use of contractions, or the acquirement of a more simple expression.

Many plans for a short-hand have appeared at various times; which sufficiently indicate the need of one, at the

the same time that their partial and successive reputations shew the imperfection of the several attempts.

The failure of the ~~respective~~ trials for constructing a simple and more useful alphabet, in obtaining general use, will not appear strange, when it is considered that the authors of them have arbitrarily obtruded methods on the public, unsupported by philosophic principles: trivial or no reasons being given for the establishment of their particular characters; nor why their rules are frequently violated as arbitrarily as they are appointed: it is therefore no wonder that schemes founded in prejudice and fancy, should prove as mortal as their parents, instead of securing a general and lasting reputation.

In the Philosophical Transactions, N<sup>o</sup>. 487, appeared indeed an attempt toward constructing an alphabet on rational principles, and of the most simple expression: but though the proposer, Mr. Jeake, made a fair essay, yet he stopped far short of practicability. Willing to confine his alphabet to uncompounded characters, he limited it to eight expressions; a confinement which would render it almost impossible to be translated: for though a specimen is exhibited in the Lord's Prayer, yet his marks standing each for two, three, or even for four letters! it would be next to a miracle even for himself to find the Lord's Prayer in it, after some interval of time from the writing, with so vague a key; without the assistance of recollection.

When the many defects of the short-hands now used are considered, it will surely be deemed a pardonable attempt to offer another: may it not be farther said that it is no shame even to fail in essays toward improvement?

In the comparative table of short-hand alphabets, prefixed to this tract, the dissimilarity so conspicuous among them, will evidence that they were not constructed from  
common

common principles; and that fancy had the greater share in their composition.

Mr. Gurney's alphabet exhibits so discordant an appearance, (as indeed they do all) that it is no bad compliment to that gentleman, any more than to the rest, to suppose his book to owe more of its reputation to his acquired manual dexterity, than to the excellence of his scheme.

In some alphabets the differences among particular letters are marked by distinctions *seemingly* too nice for practical observance. It is true they cannot be affirmed to be *positively* so, since the authors may in general be able to understand their own writing: yet where letters are of the same figure, differing only in comparative size, the preservation of a clear precision, appears rather incompatible with the supposed speed. Thus in Mr. Annet's alphabet; where *a e i y*, — *g r*, — *d t*, — *c w*, — *m n*, — *h s*, are expressed by characters the same in form and position, differing only in size, or thickness of stroke; there appears to want sufficient security against ambiguity.

In the alphabet recommended by Messieurs Swaine and Simms, beside its compound discordant aspect, *a* and *s* have the same oblique line: the difference of the one being begun from the top, and the other from the bottom, neither is in reason, nor can always be in practice, a proper characteristical distinction. Mr. Gurney and Mr. Angel, are subject to the same remark.

Mr. Lyle, though he introduces his characters with more reasoning on the nature of language, is yet more liable to objection on account of the composition, multiplication, and *arbitrary* application of them, than any other short-hand writer. It is true his characters are chiefly curvilinear; but a person who desires to learn short-hand from any motive beyond a mere inclination to



to learn it, will probably be deterred, from the close study, which the knowledge of their fanciful variety and signification will demand.

A short hand to answer the intention of its construction, ought to be *brief, distinct, and easy* to be acquired. Its principles should therefore be few, and its characters simple.

To begin properly in the search of the shortest possible expression, we must commence with a point : from which all characters flow \*.

The production of a point generates a line: the most simple of which is a right line. —

A line may be varied in position; and will strike us with a different conception of it, every different position in which it can be placed. These are practically four: horizontally, vertically, inclined to the right hand, or inclined to the left; by which means we may be said to gain four characters. See table I. class 1.

Each of these lines may be bent into a curve, toward the one side, or toward the other; and will therefore

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\* With respect to the point, it is to be noted, that though it is the simplest possible expression with the pen, yet as it is lost in production, it will not join with any other character in the composition of a word; since it requires the pen to be taken from the paper *twice* in making it; once *before*, and once *after*: circumstances which render it longer in making than its appearance promises. It is therefore not thought advisable to adopt a point as the substitute for any letter: yet may its use not be entirely rejected; since it may serve to denote the conclusion of a sentence. For though the general use of pointing would be a great loss of time in short-writing, yet to mark the full close of a period, will be a great help in reading or translating.

supply

supply two curves.. To instance in the horizontal and vertical lines  $\equiv \text{)(}$ .

These supply us with the four curves forming the second class in table I.

The two inclined lines would also furnish four inclined curves, but the obliquity of a curve cannot be preserved so clearly in swift writing, as that of a right line: these therefore are rejected to avoid ambiguity.

These are all the marks which can be termed simple: whatever characters therefore we may need more than these, must be obtained by composition.

The only regular composition will be that of a right line and curve; as these will form a character without an angle: we shall by this one composition sufficiently supply our wants, as we are hereby furnished with four variations to each of the four positions of the right line; as is evident to inspection. Table I. class 3.

The connexion of these characters in the course of writing, will introduce no confusion in reading or translating; since, none of them being angular in their form, all angles will plainly denote the junction of letters.

We are now possessed of twenty-four characters; and what remains to be done, is the proper application of them as substitutes for the common alphabet.

In performing this task, two particulars are to be noted.

I. That of the characters, some are more easy to express than others: the right lines, than the curves; the curves, than the compound marks; and these, in their order.

II. That in the common alphabet, some letters occur more frequently than others.

The

The first is evident at sight; a corresponding knowledge of the latter, must be obtained by computation.

As the genius of languages differ, a different disposition of the characters will be requisite for every language. The short-hand alphabet classed properly for the English tongue, not being from this consideration equally expedient for German or Spanish.

The only means to acquire a general idea of any tongue in this respect, will be to select some passage in any good writer on a general subject, where scientific terms may not predominate, and then undergo the labour of computing the repetitions of each respective letter; to ascertain the comparative frequency of their use. For instance, in the English language; the five first paragraphs in the fifth number of the Rambler are selected, containing 1616 letters.

This numeration being very tedious, may possibly, though twice performed with peculiar care, have been subject to some few errors in the execution; though none material enough to cause any mistake in the general estimation.

a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	
118.	14.	49.	45.	203.	42.	33.	101.	142.	
j	k	l	m	n	o	p	q	r	s
1.	3.	57.	45.	113.	106.	50.	3.	91.	123.
t	u	v	w	x	y	z.			
136.	46.	18.	52.	5.	20.				

It is to be observed that the letter *z*, *s-hard*, which is so seldom used as not to occur once in the foregoing calculation, may be totally disregarded; and the *j*, a letter seldom used, it occurring but once in this calculation, may be sunk in the *g*: the rather, as by that means the alphabet is reduced to 24 letters, corresponding with the number of our characters. The character for *s* may at pleasure be strengthened for *z*, in writing.

Let



Let us now arrange the letters in the progressive order of their numbers ; and add their proper characters under them. When it will appear, that the characters of simplest expression, are, as reason dictates, applied to those letters which are in most frequent use ; with an exception respecting the vowels : these, from a consideration which will be mentioned anon, and which is at present judged sufficient to set aside any primary regard to their relative numbers, are placed last \*. See table II.

The foregoing arrangement displaying the systematic order of the characters and letters, to shew the reason of their association, we will now return the alphabet with its substitutes, to the customary order of the letters, to be learned for use. See table III.

Such is the alphabet of characters, such is its substitution for the alphabet of letters ; and the reader is enabled to judge of the propriety of its construction and application : whoever can add any real improvement to the scheme, will in the same proportion add to the satisfaction of the present writer.

Although an expression is here supplied for every letter, it is not to be understood as necessary for every letter to be expressed in short-writing : this would not only be inconvenient, but even unnecessary. There are in every word some radical letters, essential toward its formation ; and which are the leading letters in composing the sound when spoken. These generally are the consonants ; the vowels, excepting particular cases, being liquid sounds of no farther use than as conductors of the voice from consonant to consonant, to make a vocal connexion. In common therefore these are to be omit-

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\* If the vowels preserve their proper numerical places, this alphabet is truly a rational one, calculated for, and capable of, general use : much preferable in point of uniformity and brevity to that now received.

ted in short-hand; discretion will dictate when perspicuity requires any to be retained.

The elements of short-hand may however be rendered yet more comprehensive and simple, from a few considerations, which persons whose occasions for swift writing may render them more peculiarly expert at it, and attentive to every improvement in brevity, will find some account in attending to.

The vowels, as was before hinted, being liquid expressions of the voice, not often of farther use than to connect the pronunciation of several consonants, may be struck out of the alphabet; which reduction lessens it by six letters, *a, e, i, o, u, y*. *Y* indeed is a kind of ambiguous letter, sometimes vowel, and sometimes, though rarely, consonant: so rarely, that in the former calculation, where it occurs but twenty times in near 1700 letters, it is not as a consonant once. Its chief use as a consonant is in the personal pronoun *you*, and its possessive *your*; but for these words the letters *v*, and *vr*, may stand without any inconvenience; as no other English word is recollected in which *y* is the only consonant.\*

The three letters *c, k, q*, having the same power, may all be represented by one mark. If it be urged that *c* has sometimes a soft sound like *s*, it may be replied, that in all its various positions, preceding or following the vowels, it is softened but three times; which are when it precedes *e, i*, and *y*: and the exceptions of three times out of twelve, do not appear sufficient to impede the establishment of a general rule. In such instances, if pronunciation be regarded rather than orthography, the letter *s* naturally supplies its place. The letter *q* never appears without being followed by *u*; in which circumstance, *k* is equally sufficient.

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\* The obsolete affirmative *yea* excepted.

As *v* and *w* are nearly alike in property, *w* being *double v* in reality, one character may suffice for them: if a distinction should be thought needful, a little extraordinary stress laid on the pen may mark it.

The last reduction needful to make in the alphabet, will be to exterminate *x*; a mark hardly to be esteemed a single letter, but rather a character, expressive of the composition *ks*. No word in the English language begins with it; and it appears but five times in the specimen of repetitions. The characters for *ks* may be used wherever such an articulation is to be recorded.

The alphabet thus retrenched, consists of fourteen essential letters;

*b d f g h k l m n p r s t v.*

These letters will be expressed by the first \* fourteen of the characters in Table I.

In order to a due assortment of the characters to the letters, it will again be needful to attend to their repetitions; when to the repetitions of *k* will be added those of *c* and *q*, whose places it is to supply; the same of *g* and *j*, and the same of *v* and *w*.

<i>b</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>g</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>k</i>	<i>l</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>s</i>
14.	45.	42.	34.	101.	55.	57.	45.	113.	50.	91.	123.
<i>t</i>	<i>v</i>										
136.	70.										

The letters transposed into the order of their repetitions, and their proper characters assigned them, will stand as in Table IV.

This

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\* Since the plates were finished, it occurred to the writer, that if in the contracted alphabet (Table IV.) the two inclined right



This set of characters appears to be the simplest possible, reducible to practice: the fewest in number, and easiest in form, consistent with general use; for which however they may prove sufficient, to a skillfull hand in constant practice. As such, this is the short-hand we have been hitherto seeking; as one methodical in its construction, upon rational principles.

When the letters are returned to their usual order, in which their characters will be therefore the easiest learned, they will stand as in Table V.

Not but that it is possible to refine still more in point of comprehensiveness. As for instance: by writing always in a book prepared by previous ruling with a lead pencil, we may express fourteen letters by eight simple characters: considering the line we write on as a boundary; and varying the signification of characters with position. See Table VI. where a character written above the line may stand for one letter, and below the line for another. This however is a project not adviseable to pursue, and is rather hinted to shew what may be done, than what will answer any profitable purpose to attempt; such refinements being subject to many disadvantages.

The elements of short-hand being comprised in fourteen characters, there is no extraordinary skill required in joining them to express words: the many instructions for this purpose given in books, being chiefly directions how to violate the principles and rules therein first laid down. Few examples are here given; the rather because experience will soon teach to every person the most

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right lines were omitted, and the two other perpendicular compound characters taken in, in their order, the sett would be rendered still more neat, compleat, and distinct; as, consisting wholly of horizontal and of vertical characters, there would be fewer obliquities in their composition.

con-

convenient forms of composition, sooner than tedious endeavours to imprint on memory prescribed rules; and because each person will in defiance of general methods contract peculiar modes of practice. The columns of words in Table VII. consist of a promiscuous collection, not purposely chosen to shew the methods to their best advantage: for had this been done, these characters are susceptible of many neat and happy forms of composition, which do not all occur in the table, and which practice will discover\*. Neither is the reader troubled with grammatical distinctions: he is already supposed to have some previous knowledge of grammar, else he can have no occasion for short-hand: an art in which speed is the main object; to improve which, precision and elegance are frequently dispensed with. It may be observed in general, that whenever any obscurity may happen in short-hand, the connexion of the sense will assist in clearing it; which indeed is no more than what we are frequently obliged to trust to, in reading common writing.

Should any person imagine this alphabet imperfect, in wanting an expression for the article *A*, the point may be retained for it; and the close of a period be noted by space.

Number is already expressed in short-hand, in a most happy manner: all the units under ten, have a different sign to denote them by, four or five of which are capable of expressing sums of many thousands! all therefore necessary to abridge concerning them, is to use a point instead of the cypher. The cypher is of no farther use than to note the places of annexed figures, for which purpose a point is equally serviceable and easier made.

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\* No great stress is laid on the specimens exhibited, as practice will improve the methods and dexterity of composition; and as some imperfections appear in this table on revival. It must also be observed, that the plates in several instances are not engraved with all the accuracy and neatness requisite:

Arbitrary marks, and what are called symbolical characters, are foreign to the purpose of this tract. The use of them is rather a playfulness of fancy than a real improvement, yet are they sometimes ingenious and clean. As every one who undertakes to learn a short-hand, may be supposed to have some particular occasion for it, which will be partial, that is limited to some one among the various sciences, arts, and employments of mankind; whatever arbitrary or symbolical abbreviations are contrived, each person will suit his occasions and fancy in: a hint or two however may not be amiss, to regulate what are hardly proper to be encouraged. Divinity, Law, Politics, Physic, &c. have many technical terms frequently occurring, which according as the present need may hint, initial capitals in common writing hand may stand for. Nothing should be accepted as a symbol, that is not strikingly figurative: a caution not impertinent, when we examine the generality of figures offered under that name; and whatever is wrote hieroglyphically, ought to be distinguished from the regular characters, either by size or stress of hand.

To conclude.

This is not published as a *complete* treatise on the art of Short-hand; it is only hoped, that the principles here laid down, and the characters thence deduced and recommended, may be such, that every person may form to himself a method from them the most clear, regular, and *consistent with those indispensable properties*, the shortest possible.

Should any such consequences result from this publication, the purpose of the Writer will be answered.





### Table I

$\overbrace{-1 \ / \ \backslash}^1 \quad \overbrace{\sim \cup \ ) \ (}^2 \quad \overbrace{- \_ - \_ - \ ) \ ( \ ) \ ( \ ) \ / \ \backslash \ ( \ \backslash \ ) \ \backslash}^3$

## II

136 123 118 101 91 87 82 50 49 45 45 42 33 18 14 5 3 3      203 142 118 106 46 20  
t s n h r l m p o d m f g v b x k q    e i a o u y  
- | / \ - - ) ( - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -  
/ < \ < ) <

### III

a b c d e f g h i k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y  
^ ) \_ / \ ( ) \_ / \ ( / \ ( | \_ ) ( ) ( )

IV

136 123 118 101 91 70 57 55 50 45 40 42 34 14  
t s n k r v l k p d m f g b  
- / \ ( ) ( - - - - ) (

V

b d f g h k l m n p r s t v  
[ ] \ ( ) \_ / \_ ( ) \_

IV

•  $\frac{1}{1000}$   $\frac{1}{1000}$

## VII

*Specimens from the Compleat and from the Contracted Alphabets*

π. 275-280

body	2	5	gratitude	2	2	novelty	2	5	sincerity	2	2
brevity	5	2	heaven	2	2	nitre	2	2	suspicion	2	2
courage	2	2	horrible	2	2	order	2	2	token	2	2
conscience	2	2	knowledge	2	2	ornament	2	2	triumph	2	2
danger	2	2	learning	2	2	poverty	2	2	vanity	2	2
emperor	2	2	love	2	2	pride	2	2	warrant	2	2
fortitude	2	2	mountain	2	2	rectitude	2	2	weather	2	2
fortunate	2	2	misfortune	2	2	righteousness	2	2	wisdom	2	2